

Gold Ridge Farm (Luther Durbank Experiment Farm)
7777 Bodega Avenue
Sebastopol
Sonoma County
California

HABS No. CA-2254

HABS
Cal,
49-SEBA,
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Western Region
Department of Interior
San Francisco, California 94102

HABS
CAL,
49-SEBA,
1-

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

Gold Ridge Farm
(Luther Burbank Experiment Farm)

HABS No. CA-2254

The property when purchased by Burbank was called Gold Ridge Farm, and Burbank kept that name. He also referred to the property as the Experiment or Experimental Farm or Grounds. Today the common reference in usage is "The Luther Burbank Experiment Farm." The surrounding farm land is referred to as the Goldridge District, named for the sandy soil type of the area, an area of roughly 62 square miles. The name Goldridge appears in references spelled both as two words and as one. However, the Sonoma County Soil Survey establishes the spelling of the soil type as Goldridge.

Burbank always resided in Santa Rosa, although there was, and still is, a small house on the property.

Location: Now within the city limits of Sebastopol, the property is approximately one mile from the town center. The address is 7777 Bodega Avenue. It is on the south side, centered in the block between Robinson Road on the east and Pleasant Hill Road on the west. Bodega Avenue is part of the main route from Santa Rosa to the coast, sixteen miles west of Sebastopol. UTM Zone 10; 514.531 East, 424-8785 North. Sonoma County, California.

Present Owner: Sebastopol Area Housing Corporation.

Present Use: Approximately 12 acres have been developed for senior citizen housing. The property undergoing plant rehabilitation and maintenance. Transfer of the latter part of the property to City of Sebastopol currently being investigated.

Significance: On this site, from 1886 until his death in 1926, Burbank had the space, soil and climate to experiment with large plantings of fruit trees and vegetables, grapes, ornamental shrubs, bulbs, perennials and annuals. The property was comprised of ten acres at the time of purchase in 1885. Five acres were added in 1904, and 3.046 acres in 1906. In 1923 the 3.046 acres were sold. This survey documents all 18.046 acres. Of them, only three acres have remained relatively undisturbed. These three acres are north, west and south of the cottage. The surviving plants include trees, berries and ornamentals. And, some additions of original Burbank plants which were lost to the property have been made. That the cottage survives is also important to the historic value of the property.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

I. PHYSICAL HISTORY

Burbank's Purchase and Preparation of Property, 1885 to 1926

Events Prior to Purchase. After spending the first 26 years of his life in his native Massachusetts, Luther Burbank left for California in 1875. He arrived in Santa Rosa on October 31, 1875, where he joined his brother Alfred (Peter Dreyer, A Gardener Touched With Genius: The Life of Luther Burbank, p. 92, 98).

Burbank's mother, Olive Ross Burbank, and sister Emma followed him to Santa Rosa in 1877. Olive purchased four acres on Tupper and Park Streets in Santa Rosa (Dreyer, p. 111, 112). Luther immediately rented 2.8 acres of his mother's property and started Santa Rosa Nurseries with R. W. Bell.

The 2.8 acres which Burbank had rented from his mother was purchased by him in 1881 (Sonoma County Office of the Recorder, Deed Book 76, p. 410).

On September 13, 1884, Burbank purchased four acres, fronting on the 200 block of South Main Street (now Santa Rosa Avenue) in Santa Rosa. This property was the subject of HABS documentation completed in 1984.

Purchase of Subject Property. Burbank purchased Gold Ridge Farm on December 28, 1885 from Chalmer A. and Clara S. Bonham (Sonoma County Office of the Recorder, Deed Book 98, p. 622). From the deposit receipt written to Burbank from the Bonhams, we can conclude that there was a dwelling on the property. The deposit is "for our tract of 10 acres of land, upon which we now reside." (Deposit, December 19, 1885, Sonoma County Museum.) A barn is shown in photographs taken around the turn of the century; we could not determine whether it was in existence at the time of the original purchase.

Burbank explained his purchase by saying that in Sebastopol "the conditions were more favorable for the growing of some types of plants" (Henry Smith Williams, Luther Burbank - His Methods and Discoveries and Their Practical Application, V. XII, p. 102). Burbank also talked about the need for space for his large experiments. He was quoted as saying, "I have sent to Japan to secure seed and cuttings of a great variety of fruits. The second consignment from Japan came December 20, 1885. The place at Sebastopol where they were to be planted and nurtured was purchased eight days later. And with this purchase, the project of devoting a lifetime to the work of plant experimentation was fairly and finely inaugurated." (Williams, p. 102.)

Burbank described the farm as follows:

The farm has a gradual and gentle slope toward the Santa Rosa Valley. It is undulating in contour, and its chief slopes face the east. The soil is sandy...On

this place there is a great variety of soils and degrees of moisture. Some parts of the land are so moist that the water seeps up to the surface throughout the season and the remainder is so loose and friable that moisture may be found all through the summer, even six months after any rain has fallen upon it. (Williams, p. 108.)

At the time the place was purchased, Burbank reported,

About two-thirds of it was covered with white and tan oaks, the native Douglas spruce, manzanita, cascara, sagrada, hazel and madrone, while beneath the trees grew brodiaeas, calochortus, cinglossum, wild peas, fritillarias, orchids, sisyrinchiums--yellow and blue--and numerous wild plants and shrubs...many of the wild species were utilized in experiments of great interest and sometimes of importance. (Williams, p. 108.)

This farm is one of the most sightly places in the vicinity. In the middle foreground lies the broad Santa Rosa Valley with the City of Santa Rosa in the distance; and almost under one's feet is Sebastopol. Mount St. Helena looms up grandly in the east some 30 miles away, more than 4,000 feet in altitude. Most of the hills and mountains of the region are wooded with Douglas spruce, various oaks, madronas and manzanitas. Along the streams, through the valley, grow Oregon maples, alders, ash, willows, and hawthorns. (Williams, p. 110.)

Burbank described the surrounding area:

Looking over the Valley of Santa Rosa, one sees one of the most prosperous communities anywhere to be found. In the early spring, great apple and prune orchards lighten the valley with a sheet of bloom; and later, fields of hops here and there, with the vineyards along the foothills, make a most enchanting view. The floor of the valley is like one great park dotted here and there with giant oaks, each one of them a different form; here, perhaps, a hundred in a cluster, there a half a dozen, artistically grouped as if by a landscape gardener. These are mostly white oak--though in some parts of the valley there are numerous patches of the black oak, and along the streams the mountain live oak.

...Some of the other evergreen deciduous trees growing in this immediate vicinity are: Oregon maple, box elder, Oregon ash, California buckeye, white alder, red alder, tan-bark oak, white oak, Pacific post oak, black oak, blue oak, maul oak, mountain live oak, tree elder, bush elder, cottonwood, bayberry, madrona, golden

chestnut, Coast manzanita and common manzanita. There are ornamental shrubs in profusion... (Williams, p. 110-113.)

Preparation. The trees which covered two-thirds of the property were cleared to make way for Burbank's experiments. After clearing, Burbank said that "many species of clover, wholly new to me, made their appearance. There was also an abundance of *Erodium moschatum*--a Chilean plant belonging to the geranium family. This and the clovers growing in the winter made a splendid crop to turn under in the spring, thus adding to the soil much nitrogen..." (Williams, p. 108).

Development During Burbank's Lifetime

1885 to 1906: From Time of Purchase to the 1906 Earthquake. These 21 years saw Burbank climb to the fame of an international celebrity, climaxing in the last four years of the period.

How often and how Burbank travelled from his home in Santa Rosa to the Sebastopol farm is addressed by Williams' work, his sister Emma and visitors. Williams quotes Burbank as saying, "My time was divided between the Experiment Garden at Santa Rosa and that at Sebastopol..." (Williams, p. 104). Emma related that, "Two or three times each week a day must be spent at Sebastopol. (Emma Burbank Beeson, The Early Life and Letters of Luther Burbank, n.p.) According to Dutch botanist Hugo DeVries, reporting in July 1904 in a hand-written manuscript (later printed in various publications and forms), "two days each week he goes there on his bicycle" (Hugo DeVries, *California Fruit, A Visit to Luther Burbank, 1904*. Handwritten, The Papers of Luther Burbank, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC). This was followed by a newspaper article dated July 28, 1904 which reported that Burbank had purchased an Oldsmobile Roundabout. The article remarked that, "to be sure it will save considerable time in trips back and forth from the local grounds to the experimental grounds at Sebastopol." ("Burbank to be Chauffeur," Scrapbook, Vol. 4, p. 123, The Papers of Luther Burbank, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC). Emma described Burbank working there: "These were wearisome days, especially during the fruit season. He would pass rapidly up and down the long rows of trees and plants, giving attention to each individual plant, commending or rejecting it." (Beeson, n.p.)

Physical Development of the Experiment Farm. The first photographs of the property appear to date near the last part of the 19th century. There are a group of photographs taken from Bodega Road looking south and including the cottage and barn. Others span the property. Copies of these photographs are submitted as part of this project.

The photographs show long rows of experiments, a cottage and barn, and a wooded area in the background to the west. These first photographs show that the cottage is of different architecture than the surviving cottage, but appears to be in the same position (Photograph No. 1). The surviving cottage appears in archival photographs also (Photographs No. 8, 9).

The first cottage is of one story and has a gable roof, and there is a porch along the entire front facing Bodega Road. A view into the property along the driveway from just outside the entrance gate seems to show best that the former cottage was located in the same spot as the present cottage (Photograph no. 3).

Research found during the period from 1904 to 1908 presents the first full descriptions of the developed property's appearance. Hugo DeVries wrote, following his visit to Burbank's properties, that

in Santa Rosa the start is made for every new experiment...if results are in view, and the culture of thousands of specimens is required...they are transferred to the grounds at Sebastopol" (DeVries, p. 25 and 26). At the time DeVries visited, he reported that, "About half of his ground is given to prunes. At present, he has about 300,000 different kinds; however, not so many trees. He is accustomed to graft. We saw small trees with 30 to 40 grafts, and larger ones upon which 200 to 400 were grafted" (DeVries, p. 30).

DeVries is quoted by W. S. Harwood as crediting Burbank with a new method of producing results--that of experimentation on a large scale in order to bring results sooner:

"We were unacquainted with the results of sowing on such a scale as that of Burbank, and we imagined that the results could be reached only by slow degrees...Mr. Burbank's work excels everything that was ever done in the world before...

Harwood added his own appraisal:

Some idea of the magnitude of the work may be obtained from the following figures, illustrating the average number of fruits under test at a given time at Sebastopol from year to year:

Three hundred thousand distinct varieties of plums, different in foliage, in form of fruit, in shipping and canning qualities, 60,000 peaches and nectarines, five to six thousand almonds, 2,000 cherries, 2,000 pears, 1,000 apples, 1,200 quinces, 5,000 walnuts, 5,000 chestnuts, 5 to 6,000 berries...with many thousands of other fruits, flowers and vegetables.

The grafting done at Sebastopol, like all the work carried on there, is on a large scale. In a single grafting season, which comprises more than 90 working days, more than 100,000 grafts will be set...(W. S. Harwood, New Creations in Plant Life, p. 233 and 251).

Burbank Adds Acreage to the Farm. Burbank added five acres to the site along his south property line on February 8, 1904. Purchase was from P. L. Schlotterback (Sonoma County Office of the Recorder, Deed Book 219, p. 156). A newspaper article addresses Burbank's preparation: "Mr. Burbank now has the five acres he recently purchased cleared of undesirable trees and also in a thorough state of cultivation, preparatory to planting the same, which will begin immediately" ("Five Acres Ready for Experimentation," March 3, 1905, p. 285, Scrapbook, Vol. 4, The Papers of Luther Burbank, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC).

Writers describing the site in 1905 provide further information, and sometimes adulation. Honoria P. Tuomey, a Sebastopol elementary school teacher, wrote articles about the Farm for several publications. Her description pointed out, "Beyond the orchard...no less than 16,000 different kinds of potatoes...Thousands of seedling rosebushes..." Of the nut trees, she said they "are marvelously rapid growers and produce nuts phenomenally early. The walnuts and chestnuts bear the second year from seed" (Honoria P. Tuomey, "Luther Burbank, Scientist," Out West Magazine, September 1905, Scrapbook, Volume 5, p. 151, The Papers of Luther Burbank, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC). Newspaper writer, Garrett T. Serviss, said poetically: "...in this new garden of Eden...I could feast my eyes upon the spectacle of trees gleaming with showers of fruit whose kind nature did not know until the genius of man summoned it into being!" (Garrett T. Service, "Flowers, Fruits and Such as Never Here Known Before," Los Angeles Examiner, December 19, 1905, Scrapbook, Volume 6, p. 106, The Papers of Luther Burbank, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC).

Not long after, Burbank needed even more land. A newspaper article reported that "Luther Burbank has rented two acres of the old Alex Ragle ranch on Spring Hill, now owned by F. S. Clayton, and will use the tract to raise rhubarb on. Although the local experimental grounds were enlarged one-half last year, they are proving much too small for the extensive work now being carried on" ("Burbank Rents Land," no date or newspaper indicated, Scrapbook, dated 1905, Volume 5, p. 75. The Papers of Luther Burbank, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC).

Then on March 17, 1906, he purchased 3.046 acres adjoining the western boundary (Sonoma County Office of the Recorder, Deed Book 222, p. 286). A newspaper reported, "The trustees of Lafayette Lodge Free and Accepted Masons have petitioned the Superior Court to be granted permission to sell 3.045 acres of land of the Masonic Cemetery at Sebastopol. This land adjoins the experiment grounds of Luther Burbank, and the property is to be sold to that eminent scientist, who requires a couple of acres in addition as experimental grounds. The trustees have an offer of \$500 for the property, and as they can spare the same without detriment, wish to dispose of it" ("Will Sell to Luther Burbank," Santa Rosa Republican, Scrapbook Volume 6, p. 106, 1905-06, The Papers of Luther Burbank, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC).

Employees: Research uncovered only two references to the number of employees assisting Burbank on the Farm. A newspaper article which was reporting on the 1904 acreage addition mentioned that "Burbank has at the present four men assisting him on his grounds." (Article source unidentified, Scrapbook, Vol. 4, The Papers of Luther Burbank, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC).

And by 1906, that number had increased, "...he [Burbank] employs from eighteen to twenty skilled gardeners" (Helen Harcourt, "Luther Burbank, Wizard of the Garden," The Sunny South, Atlanta, Georgia, Nov. 3, 1906, Scrapbook Vol. 6, p. 78, The Papers of Luther Burbank, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC).

Bonfires. Not the least among the descriptions of the property were Burbank's large bonfires of rejected experiments. Some accounts credit Burbank with burning as many as 14 fires per year, a magazine article of 1949 quotes Burbank as saying, "I burn the pile only once a year...By that time, it is as high as my house" (John Y. Beaty, "Luther Burbank as I Knew Him," Flower Grower, April 1949). A photo in his catalog of June 1884 depicts such a pile, with a shovel piercing the ground in front. Judging from the scale, the pile looks as tall as a one-story house ("New Creations in Fruit and Flowers," nursery catalog, June 1884). Both his sister Emma and W. S. Harwood reported the more numerous bonfires. Wrote Emma in 1908, "A continual weeding-out process in in operation; in one year on the Gold Ridge farm, 65,000 two- and three-year-old berry bushes were burned in one big bon-fire and there were 14 other fires of equal size on the farm that year..." (Emma Burbank Beeson, "Plant Life, The Progressive Teacher, 1908, Scrapbook, Vol. 9, p. 30, The Papers of Luther Burbank, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC). Harwood also wrote of more bonfires, "In a single year, as many as 14 of these huge bonfires have been lighted on the hills of Sebastopol, consuming hundreds of thousands of plants." (Harwood, p. 39.)

W. P. Stark Visits. The first visit of a Stark Bros. Nursery owner occurred in 1906. Stark Bros. Nursery was to become the lessee of the Farm after Burbank's death. At the time, Stark was "already handling some of Mr. Burbank's creations and has, from time to time, forwarded the distinguished scientist flowers and fruits for experimental purposes" ("Big Nurseryman Visits Burbank," Santa Rosa Press Democrat, February 10, 1906, Scrapbook Volume 6, p. 107, The Papers of Luther Burbank, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC).

Development of Surrounding Agricultural Area and Community of Sebastopol

At the time of purchase, the Gold Ridge district was firmly established as a favorable fruit-growing region.

Sebastopol itself shows on an 1877 Atlas map as a town of two crossing streets. The land from which Gold Ridge Farm was to be created was a 200-acre parcel belonging to John Walker (Thomas H. Thompson and Company, Historical Atlas of Sonoma County of 1877). By 1898 Sebastopol had seven streets (Reynolds and Proctor, Illustrated Atlas of Sonoma County, California 1898).

An unincorporated town until May 1902, Sebastopol was the commercial center of what was called the Analy Township--named after the early owner of a large tract of land whose name was Annaly.

The railroad was extended from Santa Rosa, bringing in the first train on February 1890.

The 1898 Atlas credits the township with three wineries, producing 300,000 gallons of wine per year, a grape dryer, crops of dried apples, cherries, pears, peaches, berries, prunes, green apples, grapes, hops, hay, vegetables, poultry, eggs and butter, totalling \$325,000. The Atlas describes the township as follows: "Soil of almost the entire township is sandy loam...no adobe in it. A most fortunate combination is found in this township in soil and water. Under the surface, at varying but never great depth, is found a sort of underground current of water; a current that always exists in the same capacity...by proper cultivation, sufficient moisture is absorbed to preclude the necessity for irrigation..."

By this time, Luther Burbank was considered newsworthy, and the Atlas reports that he "chose a spot near Sebastopol as being best adapted for the cultivation of every kind of vegetation..." (Atlas, 1898, p. 57).

The Sebastopol Times on March 5, 1902 claimed that "Sebastopol is the center of the very best deciduous fruit country in California."

Newspaper reports give a glimpse into the community at the turn of the century. The poor-quality roads were a constant topic. The Sebastopol Times reported on the condition of the roads frequently: "The Freestone [a community seven miles west of Sebastopol] Road is almost impossible. For years past, poor highways have greatly retarded the development of Analy Township and the growth of Sebastopol" (January 4, 1899), and, on February 21, 1900, "Several loads of gravel were placed on Main Street last week." And regarding the Bodega Road, on June 14 the newspaper reported that "Roadmaster Mall is covering the sand in front of the cemetery (adjoining Burbank's property) with a coat of gravel, thus making a great improvement."

To further solve the problem of the poor roads, the Sebastopol Times reported on April 11, 1900 on the establishment of a stage line between Occidental [west of Sebastopol] and Santa Rosa by way of Sebastopol. "For many years, people residing along the road connecting the little redwood city with Sebastopol and the county seat have been hoping for direct communication with the place named."

The lack of a water system was pointed out by the editor of the Sebastopol Times on July 4, 1900, and the need for a sewage system, on December 12, 1900.

But, in spite of the problems, the area did prosper. The Sebastopol Times expressed local pride in 1900: "A real estate and building boom

is in progress in Sebastopol, and many costly and important improvements are being made" (December 20, 1899), and, on February 7 reported that "Immense quantities of brick and lumber arrive daily for building now in cause of construction in Sebastopol." "New cement sidewalks were installed" (Sebastopol Times, April 11, 1900).

On July 18, 1900, the Sebastopol Times reported that the streets were being graded and current sidewalks laid. Referring to what the railroad did for agriculture, the newspaper pointed out, "Sebastopol has splendid facilities for the transportation of its various products..." (January 2, 1903). (Sebastopol Times issues: Western Sonoma County Historical Society Archives, Sebastopol, California.)

Attention Attracted by Burbank Affects Property. By 1902, Burbank had become a national hero, attracting a great deal of newspaper coverage. Scrapbooks pasted with magazine and newspaper articles were compiled at the Burbank site in Santa Rosa (the scrapbooks were donated to the Library of Congress by Elizabeth Burbank upon her death). The period from 1902 to 1907 saw the most news coverage and gives us the greatest body of descriptions by visitors.

At Santa Rosa, Burbank at first accommodated visitors, limiting them to five minutes (Emma Burbank Beeson, The Miracle Maker, n.p., The Papers of Luther Burbank, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, and other), but by 1904 his catalogs pointed out that the property is posted: "Private Gardens - Positively No Visitors Allowed." He did, apparently, allow some visitors by appointment. As reported by Harwood and others, a form was required to be completed by visitors. It designated a visitor's number and asked,

What is your business with Mr. Burbank?...For whose benefit is this interview?...Your name and address?...
(Harwood, p. 301).

Another form devised to help Burbank reply to letters stated:

ASK NO QUESTIONS WHICH YOU THINK CAN BE ANSWERED ELSEWHERE. If a reply is desired which requires more space than a postal card affords, always enclose \$5.00...absolutely no visitors at the Sebastopol farm..." (Harwood, p. 297).

But visitors actually were allowed at Sebastopol--for a price. A "TICKET OF ADMITTANCE TO BURBANK'S SEBASTOPOL EXPERIMENT FARM" was issued as reported by Harwood and others. It read:

Void Unless Dated and Signed by Proprietor...Date...
Signature...Prices for Admittance of Visitors During the Busy Months of April, May, June, July, August and September: Each person, one hour, \$10; Each person, one-half hour, \$5; Each person, one-quarter hour, \$2.50. Admittance will be allowed at one-half the above-named prices during the other six months...
(Harwood, p. 302).

Harwood reported that "In a single year, fully six thousand people visit the grounds at Santa Rosa--as many would go to Sebastopol if they could get in." (Harwood, p. 299.) A Los Angeles newspaper also described the plight of would-be visitors:

Uninvited visitors by thousands have sought to view the Burbank Experimental Grounds...but high fences and locked gates protect the tract at Sebastopol, and warning signs are posted about" ("The Creations of Luther Burbank," Los Angeles Herald, February 8, 1903, The Papers of Luther Burbank, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC).

Just how many visitors were allowed on the property at Sebastopol did not appear in any reports until 1908.

I had even seen the printed slips that had been used to head off visitors, averaging about 35 a day. (John D. Barry, "Wave of the World," Scrapbook, Vol. 17, p. 226, The Papers of Luther Burbank, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC).

By 1900, Burbank's work on the Farm was important enough to be reported in the local news. That plants from Mt. Tamalpais (50 miles south) (Sebastopol Times, April 18, 1900), and seeds from Central America and Hawaii were to be planted for experimentation, is an example of a local attention to small details about the Farm. And, glowing over its appearance, while pointing out its inaccessibility, a newspaper reported:

The Sebastopol grounds are awakening into life and a vigor and, if anything, are more gorgeously abloom at present...The fruit trees are especially giving evidence of their wondrous beauty soon to unfold...a peep over the fence is all that is vouchsafed except to a favored few ("Promise of Spring," source missing, March 25, 1904, Scrapbook, Vol. 4, p. 101, The Papers of Luther Burbank, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC).

But visitors were not the only ones wanting to get onto the property. Burbank received at least one mailed application for employment per day, and sometimes many ("What the Mail Brings for Luther Burbank, the Wonder of the West," Handwritten: Rep., Scrapbook, Vol. 4, 1902, p. 55, The Papers of Luther Burbank, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC).

Although the town of Sebastopol never used Burbank's association with it in the promotional way Santa Rosa had, its newspaper did report activity at the Farm, and at one point, got into an argument about who Burbank belongs to. A Sebastopol paper reported that:

A Southern California paper has laid claim to Burbank, at which a Santa Rosa paper jumps sky-high...Now the

fact is Burbank eats and sleeps at...Santa Rosa...but his great work...is all done at Sebastopol, and Sebastopol is his true home, for where a man's treasure is there is his heart and home, also ("Who Does Burbank Belong to?" Analy Standard, June 1905, Scrapbook, Vol. 4, p. 235, The Papers of Luther Burbank, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC).

Another Sonoma County town, Petaluma, got into the discussion. An article in its local paper stated:

...the Analy Standard is wrong. Mr. Burbank belongs to Sonoma County... (Title missing, Petaluma Courier, June 14, 1905. Scrapbook, Vol. 4, p. 235, The Papers of Luther Burbank, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC).

By 1908, some of the emotion was gone with the Sebastopol Times stating:

...Although the people of Santa Rosa gloat over the fact that Mr. Burbank has his home there, the people of Sebastopol are equally as proud of the fact that his principal experiments take place on soil of established value in their city, and the fact that Mr. Burbank has selected Sebastopol as the place to carry on his work should be sufficient to convince the most skeptical soil expert...for results count, and Mr. Burbank secures the most wonderful of results ("Why Burbank Has His Grounds Here," Sebastopol Times, Oct. 17, 1908, Scrapbook, Vol. 9, p. 179, The Papers of Luther Burbank, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC,).

Development from 1906 Earthquake to 1923

The most damaging earthquake in California's history struck the area from San Francisco to Sonoma County on April 18, 1906. Its effects on the Farm and cottage were reported by two observers. David Starr Jordan reported,

At Burbank's farm, 0.5 miles west of Sebastopol, I noted these things: In the lot adjoining to the south, the soil being clayey, there is a large crack running northwest and southeast, or nearly so, and according to Burbank, 0.25 mile long. It runs through the fields and weeds and was very distinct on August 6. The end of this crack comes up against the sandy hill, but on the east side of the line of the crack, the rows of trees and plants were shifted toward the south--or, if you prefer it, those on the west side toward the north--two or three feet. A well of Mr. Burbank's, sunk in the sandy ground, is bodily shifted, without being injured, along with the rows of plants between

which it is placed. No crack appears at the surface in Burbank's ground, but on the other side of the hills, to the north of it, I was told the crack reappears. (California Earthquake Investigation Committee, The California Earthquake of April 18, 1906, p. 204.)

The foreman at the Farm, referred to as, "Mr. Lawrence," stated:

Men standing or walking at the time of the shock were thrown from their feet, as were cows and horses. The small house on the Burbank place was moved from its foundation a few inches downhill... On the Burbank Farm a small landslide occurred, a layer of moist soil only a few feet in thickness moving down the slope, introducing bends in various lines of cultivated plants" (Ibid., p. 205).

The effect of the earthquake on the Cottage gives a clue to when the later cottage was probably built.

The new brick buildings in the town of Sebastopol were heavily damaged or destroyed. Wood buildings fared better, but many were knocked off foundations and some collapsed, as indicated by photographs in Western Sonoma County Historical Society archives and in the earthquake report, p. 204.

Move to Sebastopol Rumored. A 1907 report of Burbank's possible move to Sebastopol might indicate that the later cottage was not built immediately after the earthquake. A newspaper reported:

for a month or more, it has been rumored that Luther Burbank...contemplated changing his place of residence from Santa Rosa to Sebastopol. It is now said that Mr. Burbank has at last fully made up his mind to make the move. It is the intention of Mr. Burbank to erect a handsome home in the center of his farm...it is said he is to erect, among other buildings, a large greenhouse" ("Burbank to Move: Planning to Reside on his Sebastopol Farm," Source missing, handwritten place and date, Sebastopol, California, September 26, 1907, Scrapbook V. 6, p. 291, The Papers of Luther Burbank, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC).

One might conclude that in 1907 there was still not another dwelling on the Farm.

Nothing more was found in the Scrapbook newspaper articles about this move. Burbank had, in fact, in 1906, just moved from the Santa Rosa Gardens house to a large new home he had built across the street from the Gardens.

Burbank Marries. In 1916 Burbank married his secretary, Elizabeth Waters. Being 41 years younger than he, she was to survive him by 51 years. She never remarried and retained ownership of the Farm property until

1974, three years before her death. In a magazine article she indicated an intimate familiarity with the plants on the farm at the time of Burbank's death in 1926 ("Carrying On For Luther Burbank," The Saturday Evening Post, June 28, 1930, p. 8).

Appearance of Property. As time went on, fewer newspaper and magazine articles bearing descriptions appear in the scrapbooks. Stanford Professor, Vernon Kellogg, in 1915, describes the Burbank property in a way which seems to support Burbank's attempts to discourage visitors:

The gardens themselves are not show gardens. Indeed they are, as they ought to be, and even must be, if the master gardener is to continue to work in them, difficult places to see at all. Would-be visitors should inform themselves of the strict rules guarding entrance to them before skipping blithly to Santa Rosa "to see Burbank and his gardens."

They are not formal gardens, not landscape gardens. Just gardens to work in, laid out for convenience and efficiency of work, changing their aspect from week to week or this or that experiment is begun, is fully underway, or is completed. The few saved seedlings or grafts or fully grown plants or trees, the "new creations," make no very great show. (Vernon L. Kellogg, Burbank's Gardens, 1915, Pamphlet, The Papers of Luther Burbank, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.)

Maps. Archival maps of the property found in research consist of a 1916 map identifying sections only (Appendix A, Burbank's hand-drawn plan books (Appendix B, C), and a 6 foot by 9 foot blueprint of a map attributed to 1912. The 1916 map by Burbank shows five sections identified as N., N.E., and E.--on the original ten acres; S. on the five-acre section purchased to the south in 1904 and N.W. on the 3.046 acres purchased from the Cemetary Association in 1906. The N.E. and N. sections are further subdivided into numbered areas (see Appendix A).

Burbank's hand-drawn maps in his plan books commonly show only small parts of the property. There are, however, a few pages in one plan book that appear to cover large areas of the Sebastopol property (Appendix B, C). Harwood described the maze-like appearance of these pages:

The book for the Sebastopol tests is a large ledger nearly two feet in length...these diagrams or it may be mere ellipses or circles to enclose certain related facts, are usually drawn in red ink in the midst of the text. They may run out into the margin of the book, or they may be in the body of the page...I considered a sample page somewhat in detail and found that it had 40 distinct diagrams and figures and over 600 words of text. Page after page of this matter appears.. From time to time, additions are made as the plant

progresses. When the final test comes and the plant is finished, heavy cross lines are drawn over the page--the end has been reached.

On one page is a large circle perhaps seven inches across. It represents the branch spread of a tree. All over the circle are jottings showing where certain grafts are located on the tree so that there may be no mistake. On the graft, too, may be notations in the form of tags, but the record of the plan books shows absolutely where the graft is,--if the tag be lost, the record remains. (Harwood, p. 323, 324.)

The map attributed to 1912 is the only comprehensive map of the property. A clue to its date appeared in the aforementioned Saturday Evening Post article written by Elizabeth Burbank in which she stated that she found a map after Burbank's death. It was,

in a neglected corner of the little house Mr. Burbank had used at Sebastopol as an office and seed house. It was a perfectly tremendous map, loosely rolled, tied with tape, covered with years of dust. Unless one knocked out a portion, he could not spread the map in the house, so it was taken out of doors. It proved to be a beautifully made map of the farm, but dated 1912. On it was marked the location of every tree, shrub and plant on place at that time, with tree numbers, some variety names...

This map contains dates noted on plants but has no identifying date. The most recent date appearing on a plant is 1913. The map is part of the Burbank Museum collection and is currently (1986) loaned to Professor Daniel Markwyn of Sonoma State University for restoration work.

The map shows the following:

Property line orientation: The actual north property line is identified as west. The east property line is called out as north, and the map has no north arrow. The 3.046 northwest section purchased from the Cemetary Association in 1906 is not included.

Fences and gates: Along Bodega Avenue is shown a "picket fence" with "board gate" at the driveway. A "picket fence" is also shown along the east property line. A "wire fence" is shown along the south and west property lines. A gate is shown on the west property line at a small jog in the property line.

Buildings: The cottage is referred to as "Foreman's Dwelling 30'-40" by 22'-40". It is positioned roughly in the center of the original 10-acre parcel about 350 feet inside the entrance. Its two porches identify it as the later cottage. No fireplace shows, but there is one on the building at present. Fifty feet behind the cottage is a "Glass House 6'-3" by 10'-3" Used For Photographic Purposes." Behind

the glass house, 94 feet from the cottage, is a "Barn, One-story and Loft, 24'-0" by 16'-5". Three feet to the rear of the barn is an outhouse scaling 4 feet by 4 feet, identified as "W.C."

Water: To the west of the cottage, about ten feet away, is identified "Well--Dry." A "Spring" with "Hand Pump" appears about 55 feet east of the driveway, about 150 feet from the fence on Bodega Avenue.

Driveway and paths: The driveway enters the property from Bodega Road about 60 feet to the left of the center of the cottage and curves west to the east side of the cottage, continuing on to the barn. A path leads from the cottage to the west property line and the gate therein. Another path runs east and west along the former rear of the property (before the south five acres were added). Another path leads in a southeast diagonal from the cottage to a path along the entire, or south, property line.

Other features" A "Six-inch Wood Drain Culvert" is shown carrying runoff 150 feet to Bodega Road from a "catch basin" adjacent to the driveway. A sign is identified about 50 feet back from Bodega Road, to the west of and adjacent to the driveway. It is identified as "Sign Post Private Property. A Grape Arbor is called out near the west property line: "Beginning of Grape Vine Arbor." The end of it is not located on the map, but the planting of grapes runs parallel to the west property line to near Bodega Avenue for about 400 feet.

Plantings: Some of the plantings shown on the map can be found on the property today (see Appendix E, a mapping done in 1983). Although there are now large elms at the old entrance gate, and a fir clump near the west property line at Bodega Avenue, the 1912 map shows no such trees along Bodega Avenue. The plantings identified on the 1912 map show some areas devoted entirely to small plants; bulbs, annuals, perennials, vegetables, roses, grapes, some ornamentals, spineless cactus and berries. Other areas are devoted to trees, but in some plantings, small plants and trees alternated. A "weeping birch" is indicated on the east side of the cottage and shows in the archival photographs also.

Burbank's Declining Work with Experimentation: 1923 - 1926

At the time of Burbank's death, there were on the Farm the "pick of thousands" of fruits ready to be introduced, according to Elizabeth. She went on to explain,

As time went on, the difficulty of selling new fruits particularly increased. Orchardists waited for the public to become acquainted with the new introductions before they would plant extensively...Nurserymen have full catalogs and hesitated to add more" (Elizabeth Burbank, "Carrying on for Luther Burbank," The Saturday Evening Post, June 28, 1930, p. 8).

Three years before his death, at the age of 74, Burbank lamented

...My strength is good for my age, but it is not what it used to be. I sold part of the Sebastopol Experiment Farm, because I could no longer operate it...It was sold to a cemetery association, and every plant on it is being pulled up and burned so that the tract may be plotted for graves. Among the thousands of new and improved varieties on this little three-acre tract were more than 40 new selected thornless blackberries, that would have been worth \$30,000 if they had been introduced to the world. In addition, there were some 30 varieties of new hybrid roses from a choice collection, some 40 varieties of loquats, a large number of new apples, chestnuts, plums, peaches, nectarines, dahlias, and so on...the remainder [of the Farm] will have to be sold for the same reason. On the 13 [sic, it was actually 15] acres that are left at Sebastopol are 2,000 varieties of cherries, 1,000 varieties of plums, 60 or 70 kinds of selected chestnuts, between 300 and 500 varieties of pears, and 50 or 60 varieties of quinces. There is also a walnut tree that for many years, has produced each year, \$1,000 worth of walnuts. This tree is so superior to anything else in existence that I was once requested to supply ten million young trees like it to be delivered, one million a year for ten years. Of course, that was too big an order to be filled from one tree. I could have supplied 65,000 trees a year, if I had been able to superintend the work, in addition to everything else I have to do. But I have supplied [only] a few thousands" (Luther Burbank, "Sixty Years With Plant Experiments," Calistoga Weekly, July 27, 1923. Scrapbook Vol. 17, p. 50, The Papers of Luther Burbank, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC).

Expressing his desire to find some way for the fruits of his labors to be maintained and utilized, Burbank wrote,

It seems to me that this farm should be in the possession of a state university (Ibid).

Stanford University Proposal. It was Stanford University which pursued the effort. A foundation was envisioned for the purpose, and a proposal was submitted by Stanford to raise one million dollars. This foundation was to be "the sole means by which the research, experimentation, improvement and creation in the plant world initiated and perfected by the late Luther Burbank may be carried forward." Claimed the proposal,

The value of the plants and trees is almost half a million dollars. The Luther Burbank Foundation would be raised in two hours if the nurserymen and seedsmen

of this world could divide up the proceeds from the sale of fruits, nuts, vines and flowers now there, and from the use of Luther Burbank records and formulas continue the enterprise on a purely commercial basis. (Proposed Luther Burbank Foundation in the Leland Stanford Junior University, California, undated, The Papers of Luther Burbank, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.)

An announcement in Science Magazine helps date the proposal. On August 11, 1925 the magazine reported,

Tentative plans have been made by Stanford University to take over and perpetuate the work of Luther Burbank, according to an announcement made by William Gibbs McAdoo, member of the advisory board interested in the project ("Plans for Luther Burbank's Experimental Farm," Science, V. 62, August 11, 1925, p. 238, The Papers of Luther Burbank, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC).

Burbank Tries to Sell. Burbank listed the property with a realtor. A 1924 flyer directed inquiries to W. Lambert Hill, Healdsburg, California. The flyer contained an inventory of the property. Buildings are listed thus: "five-room house; packing shed, tool house and stable." Amenities include: "spring of running water; broad view of Santa Rosa Valley, St. Helena, Cobb, Taylor and Bennett Mountains, and overlooking parts of Sonoma, Lake, Napa and Marin Counties. Situated about 200 feet from city limits of Sebastopol on paved highway to the coast, eight miles west of Santa Rosa." Listed plants ranged from single specimens to numbers of "14,846 new seedling hybrid chestnut trees" (The Burbank 13-acre [sic], Goldridge Experiment Farm, Inventory, January 1, 1924 photocopy, Western Sonoma County Historical Society Archives, Sebastopol, California).

Burbank's Death. Luther Burbank died at the age of 77 on April 10, 1926 with the future of the Farm unresolved.

Stark Bros. Involvement

Lease: Stanford was unsuccessful in establishing the foundation, and the property was leased by Stark Bros. Nurseries and Orchards Company. The first lease agreement was signed on August 23, 1927 with Elizabeth. This first lease paid Elizabeth \$5,000, plus \$1,000 per year for 15 years for Stark to receive "the business, name, and good will of any and all seed and bulb business..." and to be "the sole authorized distributor of Luther Burbank's seeds and bulbs" (Sonoma County Office of the Recorder, Book 182, p. 182). Another agreement was signed in the next month, on September 6, 1927. For \$100 per year, it provided Stark Bros. "the exclusive right...to conduct, carry on, and complete certain experimental work with trees and plants, begun by the late Luther Burbank,...and the right to test, name, and distribute to the public new varieties of trees and plants perfected by said Luther Burbank during his lifetime, and also the right to test, carry on, and complete experiments of said Luther

Burbank in trees and plants uncompleted at the time of his death..." This agreement goes on to refer to "the young apple orchard now on ten acres, more or less, of said property." This is the first mention of part of the property being converted to an apple orchard and indicates it began during Burbank's lifetime. The agreement stipulates Elizabeth's ownership and control of the apple orchard, but grants use of the land between the rows of trees and the plants "now standing there." This agreement also granted Stark Bros., for \$2,000, "all rights to new varieties of fruits and plants, both completed and uncompleted experiments of the late Luther Burbank, not yet at the date of this contract introduced to the public...with the exception of the 'Royal and Paradox walnuts.'" Plants sold by Stark were to provide a royalty to Elizabeth of three cents per plant for plants selling over one dollar each and three percent of sales of those under one dollar each. Propagation by Stark from trees already introduced did not require a royalty (Sonoma County Office of the Recorder, Book 260, p. 315).

Stark Bros. renewed their leases until 1957, when on August 22, a termination agreement was signed (Sonoma County Office of the Recorder, Book 2588, p. 752).

Thus Burbank's former customer took over the Burbank experiment properties for 30 years. Stark Bros. Nurseries claimed that Burbank had selected it:

On the Saturday before he died, Luther Burbank said to his wife: "If anything happens to me, you will have to dispose of the business and the work, because you can't go on with it. There aren't a dozen organizations in the world that are equipped to do anything with it; of them there is only one I can think of that would really make the most of it." He named the Stark Bros. organization (The Story of a Trust: How the Life Work of Luther Burbank was Handed On, Bregger papers, undated, p. 5, typewritten, Luther Burbank Farm File, Sebastopol City Hall, Sebastopol, California).

Stark Bros. concluded their story by stating:

This little booklet was written to show how difficult and delicate was the task of finding the proper organization to carry on the work of the great plant master...Stark Bros. met the test in every particular. Stark Bros. were chosen to carry on the work (Ibid, p. 8).

In their enthusiasm, Stark sponsored a series of 15 radio talks about Burbank's work. Copies of the scripts are undated, but Radio Station KMOX is mentioned (Ibid, Bregger papers). Stark Bros. no doubt enhanced their status through their new association with Burbank's heritage in plants.

Stark Bros. Active Period, 1927 to 1936. Stark sent three horticulturists at different times to Gold Ridge Farms.

John Bregger. John Bregger, Stark Bros.' first horticulturist, arrived on May 3, 1927. Bregger was in charge of Stark's orchard research department when he was given the opportunity to work at Gold Ridge Farm. Bregger described his function:

I evaluated all the plant materials that were left. I described over 900 varieties of plum in one year. He [Burbank] had grafted on these trees 5 to 15 varieties on each tree down the line, so there was a whale of a lot of variety. (George Hower, "Horticulturist Recalls Burbank's Genius," Santa Rosa Press Democrat, June 7, 1977).

According to Bregger, Stark Bros. intended to "continue breeding work, more or less in the way he [Burbank] did it" (Ibid), but the depression halted those plans. However, Stark did continue the cataloging and sending of material back to Stark's Missouri nursery.

Bregger said that there was practically nothing in the way of furniture in the cottage when he arrived (John Bregger, interview, June 1, 1977).

Newell Vanderbilt. Newell Vanderbilt, in 1929, took over from Bregger. Vanderbilt was a friend of Burbank's and a delphinium hybridizer working in San Rafael, about 25 miles south of Sebastopol. He commuted to the Farm to continue Stark's endeavors.

The last horticulturist to carry on the work was Joseph Keil, who with his family, was to settle into the community for many years.

The most complete description of the cottage at this time is contained in a letter from Vanderbilt to Keil. The description was accompanied by a sketch (Appendix F). Some highlights of the description include, "All house quite new, renovated. Good paper, etc...unusually well lighted with windows." He also mentions the fireplace, glass doors on the north and south entrances and a bathroom with standard fixtures, as well as an electric range, cooler closet, and "inset from south kitchen wall is iron board and drop-down small breakfast table." Vanderbilt described bedroom furniture left behind and belonging to Bregger. He noted the need for repairs to the electric heater and range and for window shades, living room furniture and culinary equipment (Vanderbilt to Keil, December 22, 1930, Western Sonoma County Historical Society Archives, Sebastopol, California).

Joseph Keil. In June of 1931, Joseph Keil moved into the cottage with his wife Gertrude, son Richard and daughters Elizabeth and Janet. He added a room to the south of the cottage.

Plant Record. Joseph Keil continued the cataloging and produced a typewritten (with daughter Elizabeth's help), documentation. It was housed in a binder and has been recently donated to Western Sonoma County

Historical Society Archives. The document is titled Master Record Burbank Experimental Farm. Sebastopol, California. Fruit, Ornamental and Miscellaneous Planting. The title sheet credits original by J. B. Keil, copy by Elizabeth M. Keil 1931. In the document, fruit trees are charted row by row. Branch locations of grafts are described by compass positions and such words as lower, upper and main. The dates of the bloom periods and ripe periods are called out. The cataloging of areas of small plants and miscellaneous shrubs list plants by row and by the quantity and either a botanical or common name. A catalog section on blueberries is set up to provide more information on each plant than the rest of the catalog. Size, form, flavor, description of plant form, crop size and comments are included. No. C-17, for example, is ripe 5/18, of large size, round oblate form, of mild subacid flavor, a medium bush, having very heavy crop and bronze foliage. This is done for some 260 blueberry plants.

The property and their lives on it were described in interviews with Richard Keil, his mother Gertrude and sister Elizabeth Keil Clark. The buildings on the property described by the Keils were the cottage, the barn and outhouse. The glass house shown on the 1912 map was not in existence when the Keils arrived. Richard said the barn had stalls with sliding doors for four horses. The "dry well" shown on the map had been converted into a brick cistern, three to four feet across, but it had been cracked since the 1906 earthquake. The Keils filled it with canning jars of old or spoiled fruit. "We had brought from Missouri a large quantity of canned fruit. I don't know why, there was so much here...fruit fell off the trees by the ton." The cistern is not discernible now, the roots of a eucalyptus tree planted about six or eight feet away by Gertrude has no doubt obliterated it. Richard said they carried in water for domestic use in a 27-gallon tank on their auto's running board. The toilet was seldom used; according to Keil, they used the outhouse.

Keil described how some trees were planted in beds sometimes only one foot apart. Some evidence of that remains today. Experimental trees planted with no intention of their reaching maturity grow now on the farm crowded and in narrow rows (See Photographs 7, 20, 21).

A most remarkable fact about the Farm was that it was not necessary to irrigate. This was true at least through the period of the Stark Bros.' active involvement, according to Keil. With the population increase in the area, the water table is no doubt lower. Plants added to the property today require irrigation.

Asked if Stark did any actual plant breeding, Keil replied, "We did a little experimentation trying to find a pollenizer for a red plum that Stark was enamored with. We had one tree with a cage [to keep bees from pollinating it], we would take pollen from others, but it wouldn't pollenate."

As a youth, Richard helped his father on the Farm and at Burbank Gardens in Santa Rosa. He described their involvement. His father was on full salary for one and one-half years, then for a short period on one-third salary. In 1934, Keil also worked for Burpee Seed

Company, who had bought Stark's interest in the seed and bulb part of Burbank's legacy. This lasted for two years. For the duration of Stark's lease of the property, "We were given anything that could be harvested from the Farm. We packaged fruit attractively and sold it in the seed house in Santa Rosa. We also made souvenirs from the Royal walnut wood and other fruit wood." During the cataloging and afterward, the Keils pruned the trees, removed the dead ones, thinned fruit and harvested seeds. They picked up the Royal walnuts for Stark and shipped them to Louisiana, Missouri. This continued until the 1940's. Joseph Keil was also responsible for hiring the maintenance work, which went on for some years. The Keils lived in the cottage until 1937 and then moved into the town of Sebastopol. Richard said that they were tired of hauling water. Joseph Keil taught at Santa Rosa Junior College for 24 years. (Richard and Gertrude Keil and Margaret Keil Clark interview, July 27, 1977, taped, and with Richard by telephone, September 13, 1986, and Richard Keil to Renee Felciano, letter, September 5, 1986, Western Sonoma County Historical Society Archives, Sebastopol, California).

Stark Bros. Declining Use of the Property, 1936-1957

Development as an Apple Ranch Continued. After Stark had taken budwood samples, trees were removed, and Elizabeth continued developing most of the property as an apple ranch. In 1936, experiments east of the cottage were removed to make way for trees (Phyllis Keeney, History of the Site of the Luther Burbank Experiment Farm, May 16, 1973, typewritten). By 1941 all grafted fruit in the S section (south) had been removed (Ibid).

Richard Keil said that the Keil family continued to have the privilege of taking and using fruit and wood from the Farm.

Development of Surrounding Area. The town of Sebastopol grew slowly and to this day is still a small town of 6,000 population.

Bodega Road at some point came to be called Bodega Avenue. Its road bed, which had led over the top of the hill on which the farm sat, was lowered in 1929 (Assessor's Parcel Office, Book 43, p. 47). This created a bank of approximately 20 feet height. The bank begins at the Farm's entrance gate and continues west to the cemetery, where it tapers to nothing at the cemetery's easterly entrance (see Photograph 13). During this period streets and roads were still a topic of concern in Sebastopol. The Sebastopol Times reported action taken by the city council to pave some downtown streets, as well as to repair the city's dirt streets ("Council Takes Paving Action," Sebastopol Times, January 8, 1929). The editor in that same issue stated his concern, "One of the outstanding problems of the present and future is that of providing suitable highways for the ever-increasing traffic...only a beginning has been made if all communities and the rural districts are to be provided with hard-surfaced highways. Roads already improved are in many cases found to be too narrow to accommodate the traffic" (Harry T. Ellison, Editor, "Road Problem Serious," Sebastopol Times, January 18, 1929). Later, in 1941, a two-foot high stone retaining wall was constructed on both sides of

Bodega Road from the beginning of the cut west to Ragle Road. A bronze plaque near Ragle Road identifies it as a project of WPA (Works Projects Administration of the Depression era).

The area continued as a fruit growing and canning region.

Stark Bros. Requests Permission to Remove Cottage and Plants. In 1954 Stark Bros. had Joseph Keil asked Elizabeth for permission to remove the cottage and remaining experimental plants, but Elizabeth declined:

For reasons of family sentiment, I do not wish the cottage removed...I have had a new roof put on the cottage and other repairs made in order to preserve as part of the original farm unit where I spent many remembered days with Mr. Burbank...I have no desire to plant a commercial orchard on this portion of the ground...the old experimental orchard is on the hilly portion of the place, and the removal of growing things there would, of course, cause drastic erosion" (Elizabeth Burbank to Paul Stark, Jr., April 21, 1954 The Papers of Luther Burbank, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC).

No written record of Stark Bros.' motive was found, but Richard Keil was able to explain: The Henry Ford museum in Dearborn, Michigan wanted to move the cottage to there. Regarding the plants he said, "I have a feeling that the reason they wanted to do that was to prevent anyone else from getting Burbank introductions" (Keil, Interview, September 14, 1986).

Keil Retires. According to Richard, this year, 1954, was also the year his father Joseph retired from Santa Rosa Junior College. "And, we were still getting fruit at that time." (Ibid.)

Stark Bros. Terminates Lease. On August 23, 1957, Stark Bros. and Elizabeth cancelled their lease and agreement (Sonoma County Office of the Recorder, Book 2588, p. 752).

Three Acres Around Cottage Remain Relatively Undisturbed, 1957-73. Although Elizabeth wrote about maintaining the cottage and plants in her 1954 letter to Stark (Elizabeth Burbank to Paul Stark, Jr., April 21, 1954, The Papers of Luther Burbank, Manuscript Reading Room, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.), there was not evidence of that happening. The property seemed to be ignored save for the maintenance taking place on the apple orchard, which occupied approximately 12 acres. The original Burbank plants growing on the west and north of the cottage remained and either died or grew larger.

The First Public Attention in Many Years

The first public attention to the property in many years was found in a newspaper supplement of 1960. The article mentions the Farm, referring only to the Royal walnut. In that article, Joseph Keil was

interviewed and discussed a problem on the property. "On some areas of the ranch..., everything that is planted dies from oak root fungus. One of Burbank's apple trees, to which he grafted 75 different varieties, also died from this fungus, as did an ancient cherry on which 500 grafts were made." (Luther Burbank Edition, Santa Rosa Press Democrat, Sunday, May [no day indicated], 1960)

By 1967, the ranch manager was saying that few local people knew about the Experiment Farm. He reported, however, that there are people from foreign countries who still remember that there was a Burbank Farm in Sebastopol and find their way there (Patricia Rideout, "Giant Hybrid Walnut Tree Lives on at Burbank Farms," Santa Rosa Press Democrat, March 10, 1967). Part of a building shows in the accompanying photograph of the Royal Walnut. It appears to be a steep, high-roofed barn with lean-to section. It is close enough to the tree to be partly under the spread of the tree branches. It can be identified as the "shed" removed in 1980, as reported in a newspaper article cited later. It is no doubt one of the buildings referred to in the 1923 inventory as the "packing shed" or "tool house." It does not appear on the 1912 map.

Two months later, an article in another local newspaper gave attention to the site by pointing out the significance of the property and giving a brief history of Burbank's work on the property (Phyllis Keeney, "Luther Burbank Would Not Know His Old Farm," Sebastopol Times, March 18, 1967).

Later that year, a building referred to "an equipment building with living quarters above" burned and was declared a total loss. The fire took place on December 12, 1967. The fire department responded to an 8:30 p.m. call and "had to force entry through the closed gate at the entrance to the property. The fire department reported that the fire started inside the 100-year-old building to which there was no gas and electricity" ("Equipment Building Burns at Burbank Ranch," Santa Rosa Press Democrat, December 12, 1967). According to City Manager Melvin Davis, this was the barn behind the cottage.

Joseph Keil's Death. On October 31, 1968, the Santa Rosa Press Democrat reported that Joseph B. Keil, noted horticulturist, "died Tuesday in a Sebastopol hospital." Keil had lived until his death in the home he purchased in Sebastopol in 1939.

Development of Part of Farm Property

Senior Citizens Housing. By 1973 a non-profit corporation named Sebastopol Area Housing Corporation had been established. In that year it submitted a proposal to develop a low-cost housing project for senior citizens on the orchard part of the property. HUD (Housing and Urban Development) guaranteed the mortgage. The Sebastopol Planning Commission, on June 26, 1973, granted a Use Permit requiring that:

the northwest corner of the property (from the 48-inch black walnut tree northward) shall be set aside as the 'Burbank Experimental Farm' and a map precisely

delineating this area shall be submitted and approved by staff prior to issuance of any building permits. Within three years a detailed proposal and plan for the preservation and restoration of the Farm and house shall be submitted to the City for review and approval. This plan may be developed separately by the Sebastopol Housing Corporation or in cooperation with public agencies. In no case shall any private construction be permitted in this area. No trees or shrubs shall be removed until said plan is approved by the Planning Commission.

No new uses, development or construction not shown on the plans submitted with this Use Permit application shall be permitted without further Use Permit review and approval by the City (Minutes, Planning Commission, June 26, 1973).

The Farm property was brought into the city limits on August 20, 1973 in connection with the proposal.

"Master Plan." Through a City of Sebastopol grant of \$5,000, and \$5,000 from the National Endowment of the Arts, the Master Plan was completed by Ecoview Consultants of Napa, California under the direction of Dr. James Nielson. The event put the Experiment Farm property back into local prominence.

In the planning stages, discussion between the City and the Housing Corporation focused on the cottage. City Manager Melvin Davis suggested that "the Housing Corporation and the City enter into an agreement whereby the City will finance the cost of an architect to prepare renovation plans in exchange for the City having a right in stipulating the use and availability of the structure to the public" ("Burbank's Farm: Ready for Historic Recognition?" The Sebastopol Times, Thursday, June 15, 1978). Throughout the text of the "Master Plan for Rehabilitation," Housing Corporation and City cooperation was envisioned. (The Master Plan presented the first mapping of the Burbank originals since Stark Bros.' active involvement. The map was done by Phyllis Keeney and can be compared with the 1912 Burbank map to indicate which of the plants growing on the property then were Burbank originals.)

"The Master Plan for Rehabilitation" proposes the following theme:

- A. Repository for perpetuation of Burbank developments.
- B. Public display of Burbank plants, illustration of his techniques, demonstration of selected important concepts in plant breeding today.
- C. A center for horticultural activities.
- D. Educational and service center for selected or special purposes.

"The Master Plan" presents maps showing proposed locations of walks, a drainage system, service buildings, green house and lath house, as well as suggestions for further plantings.

The housing project was completed in 1975. (See Appendix D.)

During the next several years, the City had plans in the budget for restoring the home, fencing the property, and installing irrigation for the gardens (Ibid). Lack of cooperation and interest on the part of Sebastopol Area Housing Corporation prevented anything from happening.

In 1975, concerned about future of the Experiment Farm property, Western Sonoma County Historical Society was formed in Sebastopol.

Luther Burbank Memorial Highway. On June 21, 1976, State Route 12 between Santa Rosa and Sebastopol was designated as Luther Burbank Memorial Highway (Sacramento, California, California Legislature, 1975-76 Regular Session, Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 228, June 21, 1976). The Resolution called for the installation of appropriate signs, and they were installed in that same year.

National Register. Western Sonoma County Historical Society completed a successful nomination of the property to the National Register of Historic Places. It was listed on the Register on December 14, 1978 in the category of National Significance (Western Sonoma County Historical Society Archives, Sebastopol, California). The Society also produced a slide show on the history of the Farm.

Historical Society Action. By this time the lack of interest by the Housing Corporation in preservation and restoration of the property was causing alarm among Historical Society members. The Society appeared before the Sebastopol Planning Commission on January 8, 1980 to point out that, in spite of the conditions of the Use Permit and the "Master Plan for Rehabilitation," no preservation or restorations measures were being taken on the property. The Society pointed out that even in 1975, "The Master Plan" stated that "it is of considerable importance to restore the house on the property as soon as possible. Delay will result in considerable damage to the floor and its supports which may in turn further damage sills and wall studs" (Western Sonoma County Historical Society to the Sebastopol Planning Commission, December 29, 1979). City Attorney Edward Dermott gave the opinion that "there is nothing in the documents which requires its [Sebastopol Area Housing Corporation] active development as 'Burbank's Experimental Farm,' or anything else...in reviewing the matter, I could see no legal or technical violation of the Use Permit."

Rehabilitation

Burbank Farm Advisory Committee. Action taken by the Planning Commission was to recommend that the City Council, "establish a Standing Committee to propose implementation measures, and explore funding alternatives to implement acceptable implementation measures to restoring, rehabilitation or maintaining the Experimental Farm" (Resolution No.

1-80, Sebastopol Planning Commission, January 8, 1980). After balking at taking action at their meeting of January 13, 1980, the City Council heard further arguments and endorsed the recommendation on January 24, 1980. A resolution was approved establishing "a Burbank Experiment Farm Advisory Committee, which shall be an advisory committee to the City Council. The committee shall be composed of: two members appointed by the City Council, one member appointed by the Planning Commission, two members appointed by the Board of Directors of Sebastopol Area Housing Corporation; two members appointed by the Western Sonoma County Historical Society" (Resolution 3175, City of Sebastopol, January 24, 1980).

By April of that year the Housing Corporation had decided that the sale of the property to preservation interests would be to their benefit. They reported this to the Advisory Committee.

Clean-Up and Maintenance Begins. An article in Santa Rosa's Press Democrat caught the attention of an agency having an interest in, and the capability of, providing plant maintenance (Eileen Conn, "Attention Turns to Burbank Farm," May 16, 1980). The agency was Circuit Rider Productions of Windsor, California. A crew of 24 trainees and several consultants cleared scotch broom, poison oak and wild blackberries, uncovering several Burbank originals which had escaped Phyllis Keeney's mapping. Workers also noted a row of Burbank quinces along the east property line of the housing development (see Photograph 23). Diseased plants were treated and trees were pruned. During this same summer of 1980, a "shed" attributed to Luther Burbank near the Royal walnut (but not showing on any map) was removed and replaced with a double garage size shed. The local newspaper reported it "has raised the ire of members of Western Sonoma County Historical Society...a member was quoted as saying that this action was 'a clear violation of the conditions of the Use Permit for the land...'" (Tom Johnston, "Goodby Shed," The Sebastopol Times, July 31, 1980). Reverend Bill Marx, a member of Sebastopol Area Housing Corporation and Burbank Advisory Committee, reportedly said the members of Sebastopol Area Housing Corporation were not consulted, "It was ignorance. The manager does play a part, though" (Ibid). And it was lack of knowledge of the Use Permit that led the City's building inspector to award a building permit for it.

This was soon followed by another action and outcry. During routine maintenance of a drainage ditch, the housing management company destroyed some Burbank plants. Cropped off plants listed by horticulture consultant Bob Hornback were a trifoliate orange, Corona roses with two different colored blooms on one shoot, and hybrid blackberries ("Burbank Plants Ruined," The Sebastopol Times, October 23, 1980).

Maintenance Continues. Assisted by grants from the County of Sonoma, the City of Sebastopol, and the Stanley Smith Horticultural Fund in Scotland, Circuit Rider Productions continued plant rehabilitation and maintenance for varying periods of time until 1986. In addition, they scoured the nation for Burbank originals no longer growing on the

Farm, propagated them in their nursery, and added them to the Farm.
(See Appendix E.)

Others Help with Maintenance. For two weeks, October 25 to September 8, 1980, a program called CLEAR from Petaluma People's Center performed clean-up work. And, volunteer work days were organized by Circuit Rider Productions with local Historical Society members and citizens participating.

Circuit Rider Productions also, along with Western Sonoma County Historical Society, became involved in writing the grants for restoration of both the plants and later, the cottage. Both groups oversaw rehabilitation and construction.

Purchase Proposal. While the Burbank Farm Advisory Committee was still in meetings, Western Sonoma County Historical Society, at the end of 1980, announced its desire to pursue the purchase of the Farm (Western Sonoma County Historical Society to Sebastopol Area Housing Corporation, November 29, 1980). (By this time only the approximately three acres with the cottage and original Burbank plants had come to be known as the Farm.)

Burbank Advisory Committee Action. In preparation for the possible sale of the cottage and Farm site, property lines had to be discussed, and a place for a parking area for the Farm had to be decided upon. Through discussions and negotiations in the Burbank Advisory Committee meetings, a parking area was created as a pull-out space along Bodega Avenue, encroaching on the frontage of the housing project. (See Appendix G.) In return, part of the proposed area to be purchased was reduced by an area from 20 feet south of the cottage to the Royal walnut. Several potential property lines were negotiated. The final agreement is to continue the property line which creates a jog in the west property line, reducing the reserve from 3.14 acres to 2.7 acres. Agreement was reached in October 1981, and on August 6, 1982, a Use Permit and Minor Subdivision was submitted to the Sebastopol Planning Commission to City of Sebastopol Planning Commission (Bruce Aspinall [City Planner], Memo, August 6, 1982 and Minutes and Maps, Western Sonoma County Historical Society Archives, Sebastopol, California).

Burial Found. A copper box was discovered by a metal detector while property lines were being investigated by surveyors and committee member and architect John Hughes. Hughes took the box to his office, cleaned it and discovered the roughly scratched words, "Marion Jasper Hall, Died May 20, 1905, Age 54." This box, it revealed, contained cremated remains. Hughes decided, before returning the box to its original resting place under the Royal walnut tree, to notify local newspapers to find possible relatives. The newspaper story (Eileen Klineman, "Who was Marion Jasper?: Case of the Mysterious Urn," Santa Rosa Press Democrat, September 27, 1981) found the daughter of Wilbur Hall, one of Burbank's biographers. Marion was Wilbur's father. The urn was turned over to the granddaughter.

Purchase Fund. A fund was established in 1980, supervised by the City Manager, to accept donations to the eventual purchase and rehabilitation of the property.

Management Plan. Circuit Rider Productions in 1983 published Burbank Experiment Farm Management plan. It is designed to be used when the property goes into the hands of preservation interests. Comprehensive in scope, its contents include administrative development, program development, plant restoration and maintenance, and suggestions for funding. Original plantings were mapped for this report. (See Appendix F, 1 and 2.)

Cottage Restoration. In 1983 restoration of the cottage began as the City awarded a grant for architectural and engineering plans, and the County of Sonoma provided a grant making it possible to begin construction. Architect John Hughes was hired to produce the plans. Roof repairs and a new foundation were the first work to be performed.

Subsequent grants from the County and the City provided for repairing windows, siding, trim, rebuilding the porches, doors, painting, wiring, and some interior work. At the present time, the exterior is completed. The interior work is continuing.

Purchase Endeavor Reaches Impasse. During the time the Burbank Farm Advisory Committee was meeting, appraisals of the property were procured by Sebastopol Area Housing Corporation and Western Sonoma County Historical Society. Pursuant to Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) requirements, it performed its own appraisal. The property was appraised by HUD at its highest and best use ("Appraisal on 7777 Bodega Avenue, Sebastopol," December 1, 1983). Because this type of development was forbidden by the Use Permit, the appraisal of \$150,420 was disregarded by both the Housing Corporation and Historical Society. Meanwhile, the Historical Society hired an appraisal firm, who submitted its report, based on the site's restrictions. The appraisal was \$43,000 (Howell Wolf Appraisal Service, Santa Rosa, California, "Appraisal Report on 2.59 acres, Sebastopol Parcel No. 97," March 1, 1984).

After the appraisals, the Burbank Advisory Committee ceased meetings. The Historical Society by this time had become a less active group, although its Burbank Farm Preservation Committee continued to be active. Committee meetings were held to decide what action to take and also to oversee, in cooperation with Circuit Rider Productions, continued rehabilitation work, as well as to write grants (Meeting notes, Western Sonoma County Historical Society Archives, Sebastopol, California).

As 1986 began, the Housing Corporation Board personnel changed significantly, and with that, its attitude. It established a subcommittee to meet with the Historical Society's Burbank Farm Preservation Committee. In that meeting on May 14, 1986, representatives of Sebastopol Area Housing Corporation expressed their desire to donate the property to the City of Sebastopol, pending HUD approval and City acceptance.

At the time of this writing, Western Sonoma County Historical Society is waiting for further word from Sebastopol Area Housing Corporation.

Tree Removal. The weeping birch appearing near the cottage in the archive photographs died in 1986, possibly of oak root fungus. It was removed in the spring of that year. Plans are being made to remove the Eucalyptus tree planted by Gertrude Keil on the west side of the cottage. The Master Plan for Rehabilitation states: "After considerable study and consultation, we recommend that the large eucalyptus tree be entirely removed...it is a hazard...and it requires considerable maintenance. It also casts considerable shade over a large area, which is not in keeping with the original use of this area." Sebastopol Area Housing Corporation was reminded of this in January 1986 (Western Sonoma County Historical Society Burbank Farm Preservation Committee to Sebastopol Area Housing Corporation, January 24, 1986). This was followed by verbal permission to remove the tree. Grant money will fund the removal.

Proposal to Add More Housing Units. A proposal has been submitted to the City of Sebastopol to add 62 more housing units to the housing development. The site plan shows the units placed between Bodega Avenue and the first group of existing buildings (See Appendix G).

Maintenance. Circuit Rider Productions terminated its maintenance in mid-1986. Western Sonoma County Historical Society is taking over the task.

Sebastopol today is a town of just over 6,000 population. It is a service area for over 15,000 other rural residents. The City's General Plan envisions little growth, projecting a city-limits population of 9,000 maximum.

Surrounding Area Today. While today the Goldridge area is still an important fruit-growing region, it has experienced changes in the type of crops which can be grown, and a decline in acreage. The Gravenstein apple is the main fruit crop; however, it also is experiencing declining acreage. Berries persist, but acreage has been reduced to a small fraction of what it once was. Peaches, cherries and hops are no longer grown. A cherry blight has established itself and now prevents commercial production of cherries. Hops are no longer possible, an indirect result of the cooling of the average summer temperature. The cost of treatment for the resultant fungus which attacked the hops prevents commercial production.

Farm's Unique Potential. Unlike the Santa Rosa Burbank Gardens, which contain a few Burbank original plants and a memorial garden, the experiment farm in Sebastopol contains over 250 Burbank originals. Many are still in rows where he planted them. The Farm offers a unique opportunity to demonstrate Burbank's work.

II. BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Luther Burbank, 1849 - 1926. Born in Lancaster, Massachusetts. He had been conducting plant breeding experiments when he read, at the age of 19, Darwin's The Variations of Animals and Plants Under Domestication. It had "an immediate bearing" on his work, said Burbank. This same year, he selected a sport potato from his seedlings and propagated it. The Russet Burbank, it is the most widely grown potato in the United States. Burbank settled in California in 1874. This was a time when the need for increased agricultural production and quality afforded him the market for his plant developments. The opportunity gave him recognition, fame and wealth and made him a popular hero. His plant contributions include his new and improved varieties of fruits, nuts, vegetables and flowers. The Burbank plums still hold the lead in the commercial market. The Shasta Daisy, an entirely new species of plant and a rare accomplishment, is still popular. Additionally, Burbank must be credited with developing public appreciation for the usefulness and beauty of plants, as well as an inspiration to look at the world of nature from the point of view of science rather than mystery.

Elizabeth Waters Burbank, 1888 - 1977. Born in Hastings, Michigan. From 1914, was Burbank's private secretary. Married Burbank December 21, 1916. After Burbank's death in 1926, Elizabeth was invited to travel and lecture in the United States and Europe. She lived on the Santa Rosa Gardens property until her death, without marrying again. She retained ownership of Gold Ridge Farm until 1974.

III. SOURCES CONSULTED

Beeson, Emma Burbank. The Early Life and Letters of Luther Burbank.
San Francisco: Harr and Wagner, 1927.

Bregger, John. Interview, June 1, 1977 (Taped).

Circuit Rider Productions. "Burbank Experiment Farm Management Plan."
November 21, 1983.

Ecoview Environmental Consultants. "Master Plan for Rehabilitation of
Luther Burbank's Experimental Farm at Sebastopol, California."
December 1975.

Hall, Diane N. "Luther Burbank's Landholdings in Sonoma County,
California: 1881 - 1926." California State University, Cotati, 1983
(Typewritten paper).

Dreyer, Peter. A Gardener Touched with Genius: The Life of Luther
Burbank. New York: Coward, McCann & Georgehegan, Inc., 1975.

Keil, Richard. Interview, September 13, 1986.

Keil, Richard and Gertrude. Interview, July 27, 1977 (Taped).
Richard is the son; Gertrude, the widow, of Joseph Keil.

Harwood, W. S., New Creations in Plant Life. New York: The MacMillan
Company, 1905.

Keeney, Phyllis Theibaut. "History of the Site of Luther Burbank's
Experiment Farm," May 16, 1975 (Typewritten).

Sonoma County Economic Development Board. "Agribusiness Summary"
(1984) (Photocopied).

Williams, Henry Smith. Luther Burbank, His Methods and Discoveries
and Their Practical Application. 12 vols. New York and London:
Luther Burbank Press, 1915.

Libraries, Collections, Records

Santa Rosa, California. Luther Burbank Home and Museum. Collection
of books, nursery catalogs, photographs, memorabilia, journalistic
articles, HABS documentation of Santa Rosa property.

Sonoma County Assessors Office. Santa Rosa, California.

Sonoma County Office of the Recorder. Santa Rosa, California.

Sebastopol, California. City Offices. Files on property, containing
archives' photographs, Planning Commission, City Council, and Burbank
Farm Advisory Committee minutes "Master Plan for Rehabilitation..."
Bregger papers, History by Keeney, project plans.

Santa Rosa, California, Sonoma County Library. The Sonoma County Room. Collection of publications by and about Burbank, as well as vertical files containing newspaper and magazine articles, letters, photographs.

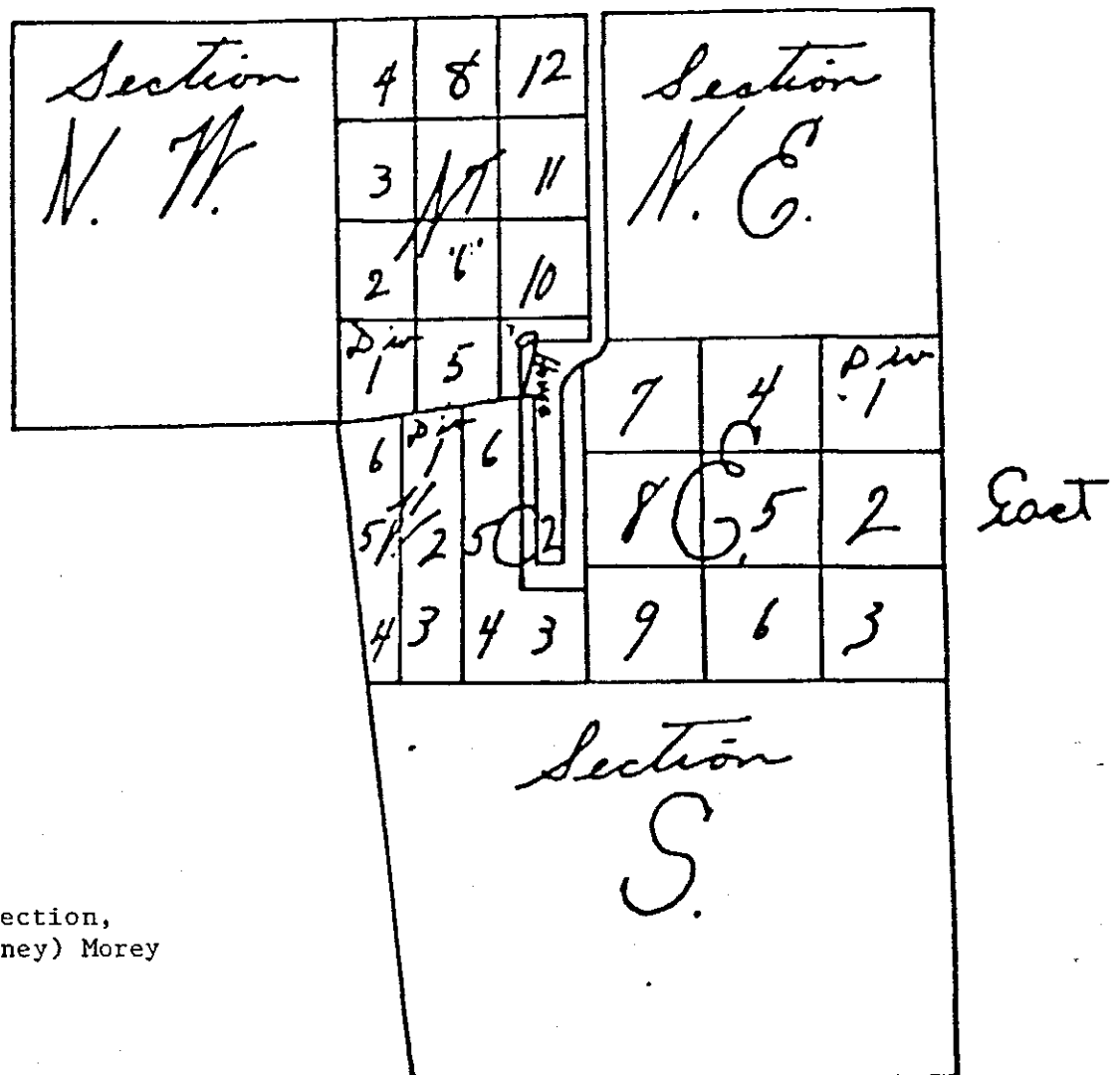
Sebastopol, California. Western Sonoma County Historical Society Archives. A collection including, relevant to the Burbank Farm property: Meeting minutes of Burbank Farm Preservation Committee, City of Sebastopol Council and Commissions meetings, Burbank Farm Advisory Committee Meeting minutes, unpublished manuscripts and reports, photographs, memorabilia, interviews, newspaper and magazine articles, letters.

Washington, D. C., Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, The Papers of Luther Burbank.

PROJECT INFORMATION

This narrative portion of this Historic American Buildings Survey Project was funded by the County of Sonoma through the Sonoma County Landmarks Commission. The project was conducted in 1986. Team: Renee Felciano, Landscape Architect; Robert Welborn, ASLA; Don Silverek, Photographer. Research assistance was provided by Michele De Bello, Paralegal intern.

*Map with
Sections & Divisions of place.*



Private Collection,
Phyllis (Keeney) Morey



SUBBANK FARM AND RETIREMENT CENTER

From "Master Plan for Rehabilitation" Shows Plan's proposal for development of historic section. (Units A-1 & A-3 were never built.)